

Annapolis Police Department



GENERAL ORDER

Number: J.3

**Issue Date: October
2001**

TO: All Personnel

SUBJECT: Written Reports: Content and Style

PURPOSE

The purpose of this General Order is to establish guidelines as to the content and style for writing reports

POLICY

It shall be the policy of the Annapolis Police Department that all reports contain at a minimum, the information outlined in this policy.

I. Reporting Writing Requirements

- A. Written reports will be prepared using a black ball point pen, preferably a medium tip or by using a computer.
- B. The reporting officer is responsible for the legibility and completeness of his/her reports. The reporting officer will sign his/her name and identification number in the space provided on the report form.
- C. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that legible reports are submitted to the Records Section. Reports received in Records in an illegible condition will be returned to the applicable commander for correction.
- D. The preparation of a written report is part of the process of investigating a call for service. Unless specifically directed otherwise by a supervisor, the officer in charge of the investigation will prepare and submit the report (to their supervisor) of the preliminary investigation before the end of his/her tour of duty.
- E. If unable to complete the report before his/her end of tour of duty, the officer will

cause Records to be notified and given a date of completion and the report shall be completed as soon as possible. At no time will an officer go on extended leave without completing the report.

- F. The investigating officer will obtain a case number from the Police Communications Operator (PCO) and will enter this number in the space provided on the report form. Each written report will be assigned a case number, a separate case number will be assigned to each incident.

II. Content

Every police report must address three concerns; the investigation, the action taken as a result and the case status.

A. Investigation

1. The purpose of an investigation is to determine the facts of an event of interest to law enforcement. In other words, what happened? The report must answer the following questions to the greatest extent possible:
 - a. WHO- Who did what to whom; who is involved in this case? Name the victims, suspects, witnesses, etc.
 - b. WHAT- What happened? What crime was committed; what was taken; what was used to commit the crime?
 - c. WHEN - Time of day, day of week, month and year.
 - d. WHERE - Where was the crime committed, where was the weapon found? Where was the victim taken?
 - e. HOW- How was the crime committed?
 - f. WHY - What was the motive of the crime?
2. The investigating officer must collect, verify and report as much relevant information as possible. Part of the investigating officer's job is to verify the accuracy of information reported to him or her as fact.
3. Always identify the principals of an investigation by full name, address, date of birth and telephone number.
4. Verbatim statements should be reported in quotation marks and attributed to the source. Statements from the victim, suspects, and key witnesses should be recorded on a separate sheet of paper, witnessed and signed.
5. Opinions should be distinguished from facts. Conclusions of the investigating officer must be based on reported facts, and clearly labeled.

B. Action Taken

1. The remainder of the police report should describe the efforts of the investigating officer to solve the case or take appropriate law enforcement action. It is essential for future reference that the record reflect what actions were taken, who was interviewed, what was learned, what evidence was collected by whom, where it was stored, and what, if any, conclusions were drawn.
2. If anyone was arrested or charged, the report must indicate their identity, the nature of the charges, the arresting/charging officer and the custody status of the suspects.

C. Case Status

The status of a case is determined by the investigating officer and approved by the supervisor according to the criteria stated in **General Order J.1**. Any change in case status will be reported in a supplement report.

III. Style of Report Writing

- A. Police reports are similar in writing style to newspaper stories. Emphasis is placed on a concise and succinct reporting of the important facts of the investigation, beginning with the date, time and place of incident, then the elements of the incident.
- B. Use short sentences and paragraphs, and write in the active tense; eliminate unnecessary words.
- C. Write in normal English. Do not use “legalese” or police jargon. Write the narrative as if you were describing it to a friend or co-worker. Avoid using words or phrases that you are not accustomed to using in daily speech and written communications. Any citizen should be able to read and understand the contents of the report.
- D. Organize the report in a logical sequence. Usually, the sequence of events as reported to you is the most understandable or desirable style. Sometimes, once a pattern is established in an investigation, it is helpful to write the narrative in the chronological order of events as they happened.
- E. Write in the first person singular when reporting what you did, whom you interviewed, or what you observed. When describing your own role in the case, write “I” rather than “Officer Jones” or “the undersigned”.
- F. Describe the role of each person named in the report. The first time a name appears (usually in the blocks reserved for the victim, witnesses, or suspects) it should be completely identified by full name, address, date of birth, telephone numbers and any other available information.

- G. During subsequent references to a person already named, refer to him or her by last name, not labels such as "witness #1", or "block number 13". If there are two or more persons of the same last name, add the first name, or a title such as Mr. or Mrs. that will specifically identify the person.
- H. Use standard or commonly accepted abbreviations only. When in doubt, do not abbreviate.
- I. Avoid ambiguity; use specific and precise descriptive words.
- J. Do not use slang or colloquialism unless it is a direct quote, indicated by quotation marks.
- K. Proofread the report. Make certain it is written with correct grammar, spelling and punctuation. Use a dictionary and a thesaurus to check your work.
- L. The narrative portion of the report should consist of an introduction, the body and a conclusion.
- M. The introduction, or synopsis, should state the date, time and place of the incident, the nature of the incident under investigation and identify the victim. For example:

On (date) and at (time) I responded to (location) for a report of a burglary. Upon arrival I met with Bill Jones the owner of the residence. Investigation revealed that on May 1, (year) between 1100 hours and 1400 hours unknown suspect(s) entered 123 Main Street through an unlocked rear basement window.
- N. The body of the report addresses the important questions of all police reports; who, what, where, when, how, why and action taken.
- O. The conclusion of the report should indicate the status of the case and the need, if any, for further investigation.

Joseph S. Johnson
Chief of Police

References
1. Accreditation Standards 82.2.1
2. General Orders J.1 Reporting Requirements

Revision: This General Order replaces General Order C.7 Offense and Incident Reports dated July 1, 1986